



Colorado Agriculture: Enriching Your Life

By John Stulp, Commissioner of Agriculture

American agriculture is the envy of the world because of its remarkable productivity. But that productivity brings with it many, often unheralded benefits for American society. Besides the abundant food it produces, Colorado's farms and ranches add value to our lives in many ways.

Our environment benefits from agriculture. Modern technology allows producers to grow abundant food supplies on fewer acres than ever before. That means we can meet the food needs of a growing population without having to sacrifice wildlife habitat that otherwise would go under the plow. The "Green Revolution" created by the work of the late Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Borlaug saved untold millions of square miles of habitat from conversion to agricultural production. Borlaug is credited with having saved a billion people from starvation, and he did it without sacrificing the environment.

A typical dairy cow today produces twice the milk as a cow would have produced fifty years ago. Thanks to modern genetics, nutrition and husbandry the glass of milk you drank today had a much smaller carbon footprint than the milk your grandparents drank at your age.

Fifty years ago, a corn crop in eastern Colorado yielding 25 or 35 bushels per acre was considered a good crop. Today, with the assistance of technology, irrigation and precision, GPS guided-equipment, Colorado farmers produce 200 to 250 bushels per acre. Once again, this is an example of producing more food on fewer acres leaving room for wildlife and protecting our environment. What we all value--clean air, clear water and majestic landscapes--are made possible, in part, by farm and ranch families, whose stewardship and environmental ethic is unparalleled.

Over 40 food commodities are grown on Colorado farms and ranches. From top quality beef, pork, and lamb to lettuce, potatoes, broccoli, onions and peaches, Colorado consumers increasingly treasure their agricultural bounty. Today's consumers seek out local food products and make an effort to get to know the man or woman who grows them. And these consumers don't have to go far. They can find fruit and vegetables on the Western Slope and along the Highway 85 corridor. Their potatoes come from the San Luis Valley, and their milk from northeastern Colorado. Over 75 percent of Colorado's beautiful landscape produces some type of food product.

The breathtaking productivity of American agriculture gives us all more spending choices for our discretionary income. Because U.S. consumers spend less than 10 percent of their disposable income for food, our standard of living increases as does our ability to give charitably to those in need. This high productivity frequently results in surplus commodities resulting in lower prices received by farmers.

But we must continue to develop new technologies in order to meet the growing demand for food worldwide. By 2050, farmers throughout the world will be feeding another 3.5 billion people, and Colorado's population is expected to double by then. Agriculture must be prepared to meet this new food demand because in the next 40 years, farmers must produce as much food as has been produced since man first walked on the earth!

Give thanks for all the value that Colorado's agricultural families bring to our state—not just great food, but jobs, open spaces, wildlife habitat, and the examples they set of hard work and pride in their business, their family and the next generation of agricultural producers.

John Stulp is Colorado's commissioner of agriculture, a veterinarian, and agricultural producer from Prowers County.